



News Release

For immediate release: July 6, 2010

(10-106)

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Save kids' lives: Don't leave them in parked cars even if it feels cool outside

Warmth can kill children in minutes; vehicles heat up quickly

OLYMPIA — Summer temperatures have been a long time coming in the Northwest this year, and now that it's heating up, it's important not to leave children in parked vehicles. Children can die if they're left in a hot car for only a few minutes.

Already in 2010, 20 children in the United States have died while alone in a vehicle. Each year, an average of 37 children die nationwide when they're left in hot vehicles. From 1998 through late June of 2010, 465 children in the country died from heatstroke when they were unattended in vehicles that became too hot for them to survive. That can happen even when it's relatively cool out. A 70-degree day can make the inside of a car dangerous in minutes.

"Even one death is too many. They're all preventable," said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes, a pediatrician. "It's important for adults to pay attention and remember children are in the car. When they vary from their normal routine, adults need remind themselves about children in the car. Too often, people get busy and forget a child is in the car."

Children are more susceptible because their body temperatures can rise three to five times faster than an adult's. When core body temperature hits 104 degrees, heatstroke occurs. Another three degrees can kill. Permanent injury can result even if death doesn't.

"People see cars with their windows cracked open and think that's enough," said Mary Borges, director of Safe Kids Washington. "It really doesn't help much at all. In 10 minutes, the temperature inside a car can increase by 19 degrees and it continues to rise as time goes on."

Deaths occur even when it may not seem that hot outside. The first death in 2010 occurred in early March in Florida on a day that reached only 73 degrees. Another seven of this year's 20

deaths in the United States through June 27 occurred on days in the low to mid-80s. Vehicles [heat up dramatically in moderate temperatures](#).

More than 50 percent of the children who have died from heatstroke were forgotten by an adult who left the vehicle, according to San Francisco State University's Department of Geosciences. That figure has increased since the advent of airbags and of laws requiring that children under 12 ride in back seats. Thirty percent of kids who died from overheating were left unattended or gained entry into an unlocked vehicle. They became trapped and overcome by heat.

Safe Kids suggests these tips for parents and caregivers:

- Call 911 if you see a child unattended in a vehicle.
- Never leave children alone in a car—even for a minute.
- Be especially careful if you change your routine.
- Set your cell phone or smartphone as a reminder to be sure you drop your child off at day care.
- Set your computer's personal information management program to ask you, "Did you drop your child off at day care today?"
- Have your child care provider call if your child doesn't arrive when expected. Put a cell phone, personal digital assistant, purse, briefcase, gym bag or whatever you plan to carry from the car on the floor in front of the child in a back seat. This prompts the adult to open the back door and see the child before leaving. Check cars and trunks first if a child goes missing.
- Don't let children play in or around vehicles.

[Safe Kids USA](#) and [San Francisco State University](#) offer plenty of information about preventing hyperthermia deaths.

Safe Kids Washington, a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, is led by the [Department of Health's injury prevention program](#) (www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/emstrauma/injury). It works to prevent accidental childhood injury, the leading killer of children 14 and under.

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